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Towards a Meta-Theoretical Model for Translation: A Multidimensional Approach

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Abstract

In this study, we propose a meta-theoretical model for translation. In doing so, we start from a critique of bivalent thinking – rooted in classical logic – exposing unidimensionality as its fundamental weakness. We then consider how this problem has traditionally been addressed by proposing continua. While recognizing their cognitive, heuristic and didactic values, we argue that despite the promise of alleviating strict polarization symptomatic of binarisms, continua are still unidimensional and thus counterproductive to theorizing that seeks to capture translational complexity. As a way out of this impasse, building on the premises of fuzzy logic and the understanding that translation is a non-zero-sum concept, we suggest that theoretical concepts be couched in terms of multidimensionality (that is, contrasted with numerous oppositions, rather than a single one, as is the case with polar thinking). Finally, we suggest how our proposed approach can be translated into a practice of theorizing.

Keywords: binary; classical logic; continuum; dimension; fuzzy logic; translation theory; zero-sum thinking; multidimensional

Introduction

This article is a reaction to a certain methodological crisis which both of us started to notice independently of one another, working as researchers, translators, and translator trainers in two cultural contexts as different as Ireland and Iran. Consequently, what we make here is a methodological point which crosses many historical and geographical boundaries and concerns a broad range of theoretical approaches in translation studies. We believe that we have identified an issue affecting no single theory in particular but rather a widespread manner of theorizing: that is why we point to meta-theoretical implications. The selection of examples evoked to support our claims may seem somewhat haphazard (though we would prefer the term random, as in random sampling); indeed, we refer to various frameworks which are not always closely connected to one another but our argument does not depend on any potential parallels between them except for a widely shared meta-theoretical commitment to a certain kind of logic. John Ellis in his book *Language, Thought, and Logic* argues that “the most important steps in any theoretical enquiry are the initial ones” (1993, 14), and it is precisely these first, spontaneous, perhaps habitual, steps of logic that we are concerned with here.

However, in order to present our critique of the problem and suggest a way of addressing it, we first need to outline its context.

Bivalent thinking

In view of Michael Cronin's remark that "translation is above all an initiation into unsuspected complexity" (2009, 218), it is rather ironic that much of theoretical reflection on translation has historically drawn on bivalent and dichotomous models, which often have a simplifying, reductionist and polarizing effect. In the Western tradition, many of the earliest recorded statements are binary in structure and antithetical in content: perhaps the most famous among these is Jerome's principle *non verbum e verbo sed sensum de sensu* ("not word by word but sense for sense"). Another widely quoted foundational insight comes from Friedrich Schleiermacher who, having discussed the difficulty of bringing together the writer and the reader in translation, emphatically concludes that

[...] there are *only two possibilities*. Either the translator leaves the writer in peace as much as possible and moves the reader toward him; or he leaves the reader in peace as much as possible and moves the writer toward him. *These two paths are so very different from one another that one or the other must certainly be followed as strictly as possible*, any attempt to combine them being certain to produce a highly unreliable result and to carry with it the danger that writer and reader might miss each other completely [...] *I will continue to insist that beside these two methods there can exist no third one that might serve some particular end. For there are no other possible ways of proceeding.* (1813/2012, 49; emphasis added)

Let us briefly consider Schleiermacher's dimensional logic implicit in this argument. Translation, consisting of an encounter between the author and reader, facilitated by the translator, is conceptualized here as movement along a path. One of the two parties must remain immobile as the other is set in motion; otherwise there is a risk of setting out on divergent trajectories which might never cross. Schleiermacher appears to be saying that hitting a moving target is so difficult or unlikely – perhaps both – that for practical reasons it should not be attempted. So far, his logic seems credible, if a little overstated (after all, adjusting one's trajectory to make or avoid contact with another moving entity is a fairly basic psychomotor skill). But why should successful contact be guaranteed when only one party is in motion? Experience with two- and three-dimensional models tells us that making contact may still be rather unlikely: while driving around a parking lot or practicing at a shooting range, we can avoid hitting obstacles and stationary targets with relative ease. This is a revealing point: Schleiermacher's optimism about the inevitable contact between the writer and reader as one moves towards the (static) other discloses his presuppositions about the characteristics of this movement. His path is a straight line connecting two poles, and his logic permits only one dimension of movement.

Let us make a mental note of this point – to which we will return in due course – but for now focus on another related element of Schleiermacher's argument: his insistence on the binary nature of the choice at hand, reverberating in numerous dichotomies advocated in translation studies so strongly as to form a discernible tendency. Of course, a proclivity for binary distinctions is not limited to our discipline but has a long and firmly established tradition,

both intellectual and rhetorical, in the West. It can be traced back to the classical system of logical reasoning formalised by Aristotle, who proposed three interrelated fundamental laws which “apply without exception to any subject matter of thought” (Corcoran 1995, 423). These included the law of identity (“every thing is identical to itself”); the law of non-contradiction (“no thing having a given quality also has the negative of that quality”); and the law of excluded middle (“every thing either has a given quality or has the negative of that quality”) (Corcoran 1995, 424). In this theoretical paradigm, the two categories are crisp, discrete, and mutually exclusive; there is no overlap or middle ground between them; no other options are available. With prolonged exposure to such logic, we start to believe “that our thinking should strive to eliminate ideas that are vague, contradictory, or ambiguous, and the best way to accomplish this, and thereby ground our thinking in clear and distinct ideas, is to strictly follow laws of thought” (Danaher 2004). Schleiermacherian echoes (“one or the other must ... be followed as strictly as possible”) are loud and clear. Any thought that does not comply with these laws can be dismissed as illogical, invalid, or simply absurd.

This mode of reasoning has been employed in countless debates between those advocating the dominance of nature over nurture, spirit over matter, sense over form, and so on. Postulating exclusive dichotomies, sometimes called bifurcation, polarization, or posing a dilemma, has long been listed among prime argumentative tactics (as well as logical fallacies, see e.g. Pirie 2006, 19–21; Bennett 2012, 119). A well-known example comes from Arthur Schopenhauer’s sarcastic essay “The Art of Controversy”, in which he offers the following stratagem: “To make your opponent accept a proposition, you must give him or her an opposite, counter-proposition as well. If the contrast is glaring, the opponent will accept your proposition to avoid being paradoxical” (1864/2008, 21). A rhetorical victory is achieved here by compressing all possible alternatives into a single dimension.

It is worthwhile to consider the kind of epistemology and axiology embedded in Aristotelian logic deployed for argumentative purposes. Preying on the fear of paradox demonised as fallacious and academically unorthodox, it encourages or indeed forces binary, discrete and definite judgements, effectively creating a culture which promotes clarity and distinctiveness of concepts, as well as consistency of reasoning, often conceptualised as linear progression. The legacy of the dialectical method, proceeding from classical logic, can hardly be missed. Aristotle, Boethius, Abelard, Aquinas, and later Hegel and Fichte – as well as many other thinkers – have convinced us that one eventually gets to the truth by bouncing off two (and only two!) opposing views; a thesis provokes an antithesis, which leads to a synthesis. In her book *Argument Culture*, Deborah Tannen exposes the assumption broadly held in the Western world (specifically, in the US), that “everything is a matter of polarised opposites, the proverbial ‘two sides to every question’ that we think embodies open-mindedness and expansive thinking” (1998, 8). She notes that “our determination to pursue truth by setting up a fight between two sides leads us to believe that every issue has two sides – no more, no less: if both sides are given a forum to confront one another, all the relevant information will emerge” (1998, 10). In a similar vein, Anthony Pym observes that “the ideology of ‘one side or the other’ is deeply anchored in Western nationalisms” (2010/2014, 34), and Friedrich Nietzsche’s dichotomy between the Apollonian and Dionysian is one of many possible examples.

Of course, the image of two “sides”, which profiles a horizontal and therefore non-hierarchical distinction and reassuringly suggests a fair choice, is grossly misleading. One of the

main reasons for the dominance of binary distinctions is their rhetorical power stemming from an evaluative emphasis, however implicit. When examined closely enough, binaries, more often than not, are structured hierarchically and reflect underlying ideological, political and aesthetic sympathies. This is amply evidenced in our own discipline. Edwin Gentzler, commenting on a number of “binary oppositions that characterize translation studies discourse” (2012, 68) mentions the following conceptual pairs: “primary/secondary; original/copy; producing/reproducing; true/artificial; faithful/unfaithful; author/imitator; father/mistress; dominant/subservient; master/slave” (2012, 54). All these pairings express a contrast which is evaluative rather than merely descriptive. Our use of terminology throughout this article is meant to signal this evaluative dimension: we often speak of *bivalent* and not just *binary* thinking.

From bivalence to polarity

To be fair, despite their prominence in theoretical reflection on translation, bivalent distinctions have also been vigorously contested. For example, Pym in his critical analysis of Schleiermacher's position focuses on the “basic binarisms of the choice itself” and asks the following questions: “Why did Schleiermacher recognize only two substantial methods? Why did this geometry of pairs exist before him? Why has it survived after him?” (1995). Pym's hypothesis is that “Schleiermacher's two opposed methods suppress a hidden middle term, the living translator, and that the whole of Schleiermacher's text is designed to silence that middle term”. Pym hopes that if the text is to “break open”, “the resulting vision might then be projected onto the entire line of binary translation theories, ending with the most recent, found in Venuti” (1995). He challenges the law of excluded middle – probably the easiest one to undermine – as he seeks to find a third term, some middle ground between the two extremes.

Other attempts at challenging Aristotelian logic have predominantly focussed on the law of non-contradiction, drawing explicitly on ideas derived from fuzzy logic which postulates unsharp boundaries between classes, and can therefore account for imprecision and partiality (Zadeh 2010, ix; see also Zadeh 1965). For example, in his book *On Definiteness*, Andrew Chesterman, starting with the English articles as “prototypical realizations of definiteness” (1991, 2), argues that the definite–indefinite divide is not so much discrete as scalar, mapping it onto a fuzzy-set framework. He concludes that the need for the application of fuzzy logic into issues related to language “is a reflection of the more general non-exactness that is increasingly seen to hold between knowledge or theory and the facts of reality” (1991, 195) and the shift or the necessity of the shift from the outdated Aristotelian logic to fuzzy logic can be regarded as a paradigm shift in the Kuhnian sense (1991, 201). In a similar spirit, in 1999 Maria Tymoczko insisted that “in cultural matters such as translation one cannot generalize from classical logic nor can one apply the law of excluded middle”, and declared that “fuzzy logic rules translation studies as it does most disciplines that analyze human culture” (1999/2014, 140).

Given the confident ring of these (and similar) statements made by prominent translation theorists towards the end of the twentieth century, one would expect that the debate is – or at least should be – over: that translation studies as a discipline had largely abandoned the unhelpful insistence on crisp boundaries and binary distinctions. But despite

these declarations, two decades later, a propensity for binary oppositions cannot be considered a thing of the past nor a weakness found only in overly simplistic models. Gentzler argues that a binary tradition of thinking about translation

[...] extends to contemporary translation theory. Even the more advanced translation studies models developed by Itamar Evan-Zohar in *Polysystem Studies* (1990) and Gideon Toury in *Descriptive Translation Studies and Beyond* (1995) use pairs such as adequate/acceptable, source text/target text, primary/secondary, producer/consumer, center/peripheral and canonical/noncanonical to construct their system of investigation, and translations are categorised accordingly. More “progressive” and cultural studies-oriented formulations by translation studies scholars also remain suspect. Venuti [...] too perpetuates a binary logic by continuing a faithful/free dichotomy, reformulated in his work as fluent/foreignizing. Binary oppositions are scattered throughout his work – premodern/modern, invisible/visible – and although he favours the foreignizing and visible [...] by privileging one of the binary elements, he still perpetuates the traditional paradigm. (Gentzler 2012, 53–54)

Notwithstanding Venuti's protests against reducing his earlier theorisation to “a neat binary opposition” (1995/2008, 19; see also Delabastita 2010, 130–132), his latest leitmotif, namely “a more rigorously conceived hermeneutic model that views translation as an interpretive act” (Venuti 2013, 4), is developed in a strict bivalent opposition to “an instrumental model” which sees translation as “the reproduction or transfer of an invariant contained or caused by the source texts” (2013, 3). The evaluation involved in this distinction is unmissable. The hermeneutic model is rigorous and brings with it explanatory power; instrumentalism, on the other hand, “is, in a word, a falsehood that cannot offer an incisive and comprehensive understanding of translation” (2013, 3). Linguistically, the disfavoured position is reduced to a suspiciously muddled “-ism”: it is noteworthy that there are no analogous references to “hermeneutism”. This axiological charge explains why there is no middle ground and why Venuti does not seem to acknowledge any positive elements of the instrumental model or admit any blind spots of the hermeneutic one. The difference between them is a matter of truth and brooks no compromise. Indeed, any attempt to suggest a compromise would be seen as a symptom of adhering to the discredited instrumentalism and smuggling it back in disguise. As a result, the discussion smoothly slides from a theoretical to an ethical level: those who hold the opposite view – and there are no other than these two views to be held, the difference being unidimensional – are not just resisted but shamed for promoting falsehood. Interestingly, Brian Mossop in his forum provocation piece in a recent issue of *Translation Studies*, despite arguing in favour of a radically opposite view concerning invariants, confronts us with a strikingly similar binary choice: “either one is oriented toward invariance (with minimization of variance) or one is not ... there are exactly two mental stances that can be adopted by someone who is deriving one text from another” (2017, 332–333). Again, any middle ground is “logically” and rhetorically excised.

Gentzler's critical comments about the perpetuation of the traditional bivalent paradigm echo Kaisa Koskinen's reservations, expressed over a decade earlier, regarding the deconstructionist project of feminist translation aimed at “resolving hierarchical oppositions (like faithful/unfaithful or original/translation)” (2000, 44); a process which, in her view,

requires two steps: first it needs to be turned upside down, changing the previously subordinated, negative or invisible pole into the dominant, positive position. And this seems to be what feminist translation has been doing: changing the order and forcing us to reconsider the traditional role of women/translators. But the second step is also necessary: deconstruction is only completed after both poles are redefined so that neither is on top and the violent opposition is resolved. Thus far, feminist translation theories have mainly concentrated on overturning the opposition male/female, positing the feminine/maternal images as qualitatively higher and morally more tenable than their masculine/paternal counterparts which are depicted as highly suspect. (Koskinen 2000, 44)

Consequently, deconstruction “can be seen first and foremost as a continued project of dismantling the binary oppositions and revealing, even celebrating, the underlying ambivalence” (Koskinen 2000, 93). A significant contribution was made by postmodern, post-structural and especially postcolonial theorists who often applied “[t]he notion of borderline cases, liminal spaces, and in-betweenness” in problematizing binary relations (Koskinen 2000, 71). The crucial thing in this process is “not to reverse the hierarchy ... but to accept the inseparability of the two poles. They only exist in relation to each other. Thus, the negative is not external but internal to the positive pole” (Koskinen 2000, 93). Writing about complexity theory, Kobus Marais comments that “in its anti-reductionist stance, [it] ... shares the deconstructivist fight against binaries ... However, where deconstruction wishes to dissolve the binaries, complexity theory maintains them. It assumes the existence of logical binaries and claims that one has to live with them” (2014, 42). Despite the polemical tone, this is not a radically different stance. Even though these (meta-)theoretical positions are much more sympathetic to the complexities of translational phenomena by admitting a substantial degree of relativity and ambivalence, the persistent reliance on the prototypically binary concept of poles holds them back.

The promise of the continuum

Now, a theoretical concept which intuitively appears to overcome some limitations of bivalent logic – without compromising its undeniable rhetorical power – is a continuum. While preserving two basic orientations, it allows us to be more nuanced in our judgements. Researchers representing a variety of backgrounds and theoretical traditions have drawn on the concept of the continuum to stress the wealth of intermediary options between the extreme points on the scale. Here are several typical and rather randomly selected examples. Whilst considering multiple Western translations of Sei Shônagon's *Pillow Book*, Valerie Henitiuk stresses that “the term ‘translation’ is used in its broadest possible meaning to encapsulate a vast range of linguistic and cultural transfers along a continuum from literal to free” (2008, 2). Sonia Colina, in her examination of empirical evidence for a functionalist approach to assessing translation quality, repeatedly refers to the concept of “the evaluation continuum (i.e. good, bad and in-between translations)”, noting that “the categories under evaluation ... are not discrete and bounded, but rather form a continuum each” (2008, 123–124). Reine Meylaerts and Maud Gonne argue that translation studies can “contribute to a new and flexible conceptualization of agent roles within a continuum of overlapping practices between author, multilingual writer, self-translator, translator” (2014, 147). Many other

examples could be quoted; there is no shortage of continuum-based thinking in translation studies. (Please make a mental note of these three particular continua, as we will re-visit them later.)

The continuum model is not only invoked in discussions of actual translations positioned on a scale stretching between two extremes but also in relation to abstract theoretical constructs, the most conspicuous of which is equivalence, featuring in varying degrees in many definitions of translation (e.g. Jakobson 1959; Catford 1965; Nida and Taber 1982; Newmark 1988; Koller 1995; see also Halverson 1997). Somewhat symptomatically, most theoretical accounts of (or around) this concept are fraught with binary dichotomies: Nida's formal equivalence and dynamic equivalence (1964, 159–171); Catford's formal correspondence and textual equivalence (1965, 27); Newmark's semantic translation and communicative translation (1988, 38–56); House's overt and covert translation (1997, 66–71); Toury's adequate and acceptable translation (1995/2012, 70); Venuti's foreignizing and domesticating translation (1995/2008, 19); or more recently Pym's natural and directional equivalence (2010/2014, 6–42); the list could go on (see Pym 2010/2014, 32–34).

At this point, several caveats should be made. First, our critique of continuum-based thinking in translation theory may look like cutting a few corners by lumping together certain authors and their models and thus implicitly mapping them onto one another. While there are ways in which it makes sense to compare, for example, Nida's and Venuti's respective conceptual oppositions, these certainly cannot be reduced to each other. Secondly, some influential typologies in translation studies are not binary at all (Pym 2010/2014, 33); Dryden's triad: metaphor, paraphrase, and imitation (1991) and Koller's typology of equivalence: denotative, connotative, text-normative, pragmatic, and formal (1995, 191–222) are two good examples. Once again, we do not wish to conflate all these models or disregard the differences in their respective emphases but make a broader methodological point. In our view, the myriad dichotomies of equivalence and, consequently, translation types, attest to the enduring legacy of Aristotelian logic, though at a less discernible level. Regardless of the differences between the particular aspects profiled by these dichotomies, they all share an underlying image schema which is strongly linear.

Equivalence may be the most visible example of a continuum but it is by no means the only one. In his highly influential work, *Descriptive Translation Studies and Beyond*, Gideon Toury makes the following comments on his concept of norms:

The norms themselves are far from monolithic [...] [C]onstraints on any kind of behaviour can be described along *a scalable continuum anchored between two extremes*: general, relatively objective rules on the one hand, and idiosyncratic mannerisms on the other. Being intersubjective in nature, norms therefore occupy the central part of the scale, very often amounting to the whole continuum minus the small patches taken up by the two extreme points. All in all, *these constraints form a graded continuum reflecting their proximity to (or distance from) either pole*. (Toury 1995/2012, 65; emphasis added)

The key property of a continuum which makes it useful as a theoretical construct is its non-discreteness. A continuum is appealing as an antidote for bivalent logic because it allows intermediate states and potentially infinite distance between the extremes. This is precisely

how (and why) its proponents deploy it. For example, countering Theo Herman's criticism of "the pattern of binary oppositions with which polysystem theory operates" (1999, 119) and drawing on the work of Pilar Godayol (2002), Ira Torresi argues that "the laws governing texts are ever-changing and do not come out of binary oppositions, but are the expression of the constant dynamic flow ... of change in the polysystem" (2013, 218). Torresi concludes that "what Hermans ... saw as 'dual structures and oppositions', like the centre/periphery dichotomy, can actually be reconceptualized as continuums running fluidly between two opposite positions" (2013, 219).

Even though this reconceptualization might be taken to alleviate the dangers of strict bivalence, categories-cum-continua, or indeed continua-cum-categories often have limited explanatory power when applied to actual translations. Let us consider a specific example. In the art and culture section of *BBC Persian*, Farahmand (2014) argues how the mistranslation of a single word in Mikhail Sholokhov's *And Quiet Flows the Don* has affected the whole narrative in three different translations into Persian. This epic novel depicts the lives and struggles of the Cossacks at the beginning of the twentieth century. Cossacks are a group of mainly East Slavic people, inhabiting predominately Ukraine and Western Russia. In all three translations of the novel into Persian (none of which was made from the original Russian), for one reason or another, Cossacks (کازاک‌ها in Persian) has been translated as Kazakhs (قزاق‌ها in Persian; arguably more familiar to Iranians due to the geographic proximity between Iran and Kazakhstan), a Turkic people of Eastern Europe and some parts of Central Asia. As these two words clearly designate two different peoples, for a reader with an interest in the historical narrative, the translations are extremely confusing. It is puzzling that a Turkic and Muslim people from Central Asia pop up in European Russia, have Russian names, profess Christianity and embrace a culture which bears little resemblance to that of Kazakhs. In this particular case, "domesticating" the text in one aspect has "foreignized" it in another, so any attempt to place these Persian translations on the foreignizing–domesticating scale seems both impossible and irrelevant. A linear, unidimensional model simply does not work here.

Zero-sum thinking and simultaneous category membership

In our view, inserting a continuum between two conceptual opposites, by solving one problem, creates another one, perhaps somewhat subtler to detect but not less detrimental to the quality of our theoretical reflection on the realities of translation: the fallacy of zero-sum thinking presupposing inverse correlation between categories held as the opposite poles. Here are two examples of the reductionist effect of the continuum model. Elsewhere in his *Descriptive Translation Studies and Beyond*, Toury discusses the concept of translatability which he defines as "the initial potential of establishing optimal correspondence between a TL text (or textual-linguistic phenomenon) and a corresponding SL text (or phenomenon)", noting that "this correspondence can vary greatly. In fact, it may be anywhere between 0 and 1, non-existent and absolute, without ever coinciding with either of the two extremes" (Toury 1995/2012, 38). Following a similar line of reasoning, in his brief discussion of fuzzy logic as partial set membership, Anthony Pym discusses a situation in which

[...] an element can be a member of two different sets but to different degrees: a solution might be 80 percent foreignizing and 20 percent domesticating, for example:

when “McDonald’s” signs appear all over the non-American world, they are foreignizing because from a foreign culture yet domesticating because, for the mostly young clientele, they have always been there. (Pym 2010/2014, 103)

Both Toury’s and Pym’s examples rely on a unidimensional model stretching between two extremes, as they highlight a range of intermediate options. However, the idea of expressing partial set membership in terms of percentages misses the point because it requires that the respective values reflecting the degree of membership always add up to the whole (the numerical value 1 or 100%); in other words, someone’s gain must mean another’s loss. Methodologically, this is not at all different to the Aristotelian requirements of non-contradiction and excluded middle. All sections of the cline must be accounted for and there should be no overlaps between them. Let us note that there is no reason for these conditions to hold, apart from the habit of falling back on traditional logic. Under fuzzy set membership, the explanatory power of Pym’s example is preserved – in fact, we would suggest, reinforced – even if the respective percentages do not add up to a hundred. Imagine two scenarios: (i) a solution which is, at the same time, 16 percent foreignizing and 37 percent domesticating; and (ii) one that is 52 percent foreignizing and 79 percent domesticating. If scenario (i) leaves us with a feeling that something is still unaccounted for, and scenario (ii) makes us think of overlaps – or indeed if we are struggling to make sense of these descriptions – this is evidence that we are applying zero-sum thinking: the logic inherent in a percentage-based conceptualization. But, despite their logical unorthodoxy, do the resulting mental images not problematize this complex phenomenon more radically than Pym’s neat, classical-logical distribution 20–80?

Of course, it is difficult to explain what these values correspond to (some inherent properties of the text? perceptions of the end-users?) – however, the real problem is not so much with the actual percentages or the method of their calculation as with a unidimensional paradigm. If we are to draw on models derived from the classical set theory and speak of fractions or percentages – in short, linear continua – we must recognise that they are based on zero-sum thinking. A failure to notice this initial unexamined assumption is likely to result in “logical mistakes that are virtually impossible to recover from once made” (Ellis 1993, ix). To use a more vivid and concrete image, both Toury and Pym invite us to envisage a pie being divided between two people: the larger the slice eaten by one of them, the smaller the slice left for the other. However, not only is this scenario plagued by the old binary disease (there are exactly two consumers in the picture), but it also assumes that no slices or indeed crumbs can be left uneaten and there are no extra helpings. But, of course, actual acts of pie sharing are not as simple as this model would suggest. To mention just a few parameters: there may be more (or fewer) than two people at the table – indeed, their number may change from one moment to the next, as some come and others go; certain slices may be left uneaten; if after the first round some diners fancy more food, another pie can be served. Now, if this is a hugely inadequate model for theorizing a relatively straight-forward process of pie sharing, why would it apply to the complex realities of translation?

Where the pie analogy fails is that in the world of translation it is possible both to eat your pie and have it – which leads us to the second major contribution of fuzzy logic, namely simultaneous category membership. On a linear scale, by moving away from one extreme you necessarily move closer towards the other – because a scale permits only one dimension of movement. But translation is not a zero-sum game so that a loss, for instance, in form is not

necessarily balanced by a gain in function. For example, as numerous actual instances of audiovisual translation in Frederic Chaume's book (2012) attest, in lip synchronization pursued in dubbing, form and function are positively correlated, so that for a translation to be functional, it is necessary for it to be formal; in fact, preserving the form can to a large extent also guarantee the function. Similarly, as cited by Chesterman (1998, 25), Georges Perec's lipogrammatic novel *La Disparition* (1969/1988), which entirely avoids the letter "e", is a good case in point. This novel was translated by Adair (1994) into English under the title of *A Void*, re-invoking a similar stylistic legerdemain in that it avoids the use of the same letter throughout. The stylistic quality of the translation of this novel throughout also clearly indicates that translation dualities are not necessarily mutually exclusive but complementary. In this translation, form and function are so inextricably linked to each other that the loss of one would inevitably lead to the loss of the other.

A translation can be a full member of two (seemingly exclusive) sets at once. For example, although European Union laws are products of complex translation processes, since they are equally valid in all language versions, they are not translations in effect because there is no source text which they could be said to represent. Production-wise, they are translations; law-wise, they are not (Pym 2010/2014, 103). Of course, in one sense the translation of EU laws is not a special case; given the massive migration in today's globalized world, official translations of driving licences, marriage and birth certificates, title deeds, identity documents, etc., which are *de jure* as valid as their original texts, have become commonplace. In a different domain, Hephzibah Israel (2010, 181) mentions the case of the English King James Bible, itself a translation, which gradually began to function as the original text for Indian translators in the nineteenth century. Any dispute over meaning was finally settled by referring to the King James Version rather than to the Greek and Hebrew originals. Therefore, depending on our perspective, the King James Version is both the source text and a translation.

In these and many other cases, indicating this dual status by placing such texts in the centre of a hypothetical continuum stretching between the poles of source and target cultures (or between the "original" and "copy") would make little sense: they are not amorphous instances of "neither-this-nor-that" but very strong members of both opposite categories at once. Similarly misguided attempts are attested by Lourens de Vries who discusses the traditionally binary distinction between an oral and written culture:

[A]n almost impenetrable barrier was erected between oral communication and written communication [...] Orality and literacy were understood as two separate, contrasting worlds. This dichotomous thinking, the "Great Divide" of orality and literacy, was so strong that counterexamples did not break the paradigm; rather, this led to the recognition of "mixed" forms that were placed on an "oral-written continuum" that maintained the basic opposition between the oral and the written. (de Vries 2015, 146)

The problem, once again, is with the underlying logic. Thinking in terms of "in between", enforced by the prototypical continuum concept, risks a reductionist, "streamlining effect" (Baker 2010, 113). Tymoczko captures this point well when she writes:

Although the views of poststructuralists have been enormously useful in undermining structuralist binaries, there are limitations in the concept of *between* as a solution to

the problems of structuralism, for not all alternatives to a polarity or a binary figuration lie on a line between the two contrasted elements [...] Thus, not all polarities have a single continuum that we could call *in between*. (2010, 221–222, original emphasis)

By now, it should be clear that proposing continua as an antidote to the problem of translation binaries is fundamentally misguided. The problem is not, and has never been, in the insufficient gradation of binaries. Rather, what Tymoczko and others are drawing our attention to – without putting it explicitly in these terms – is that a continuum as a theoretical concept is unidimensional.

Beyond unidimensionality

This is where we arrive at the centre of our argument and touch its most important implications: an adequate meta-theoretical model for translation. Despite the frequent admissions that translation is an extraordinarily complex concept, phenomenon and practice, much of the theoretical reflection devoted to it – as we sought to demonstrate – draws on a simplistic logical paradigm and a unidimensional model.

When Stanisław Barańczak (1990, 11–12), one of the most eminent Polish literary translators, ridicules the popular aphorism according to which translations are like women – either beautiful or faithful (and challenges the centuries-old metaphor of translations as *les belles infideles*; cf. Godayol 2013), he does so not only on the grounds of its sexist stereotypes but, above all, the “idiocy” of its unidimensional logic. Setting aside the elusive categories of beauty and fidelity and focusing on the logical problem of their alleged inverse correlation, could adding another dimension help solve it? Definitely so: in a coordinate grid, each element of a binary can indeed gain a high or low score without affecting the score of the other element. Such a two-dimensional model is an improvement in that it allows us to conceptualise a range of phenomena without falling into the zero-sum trap. Similarly, referring to a conceptual structure underlying the polysystem theory, Torresi aptly points out that

“centre” and “periphery” are more productively understood as areas, as the terms suggest, rather than points in space, with a continuum of positions between the two. It is therefore entirely possible for a work of literature to be somewhere off-centre but not quite peripheral, as in the case of “minor classics”, or conversely located at or near the periphery of the polysystem as a whole but so central for one minority group of readers that it stands out as a kind of milestone. (2013, 220)

In fairness, a considerable part of translational thought already evokes two dimensions when it speaks of areas, fields, territories, zones, borders, and so on. The prevalence of this imagery is likely to come from its connection to travel, transfer and, more generally, movement. Likewise, the widespread idea of the successive “turns” in translation studies (e.g. Snell-Hornby 2006) presupposes movement over a flat surface. The ability to turn around is a major improvement over sliding back and forth along a single scale: it enables exploration of hitherto invisible or inaccessible spaces, and makes room for various, not just straight routes.

However, two-dimensional models are still quite poor in representational and therefore theoretical terms: a series of turns in the same direction will eventually bring you to

the initial orientation, if not necessarily the same position. Think of the earth: even though it is spherical, we only meaningfully experience its surface. Our position on and movement across the globe are, most of the time, two-dimensional, but the moment we depart from the surface by either descending underground or climbing a multiple-floor structure, we are not making any progress towards any of the cardinal directions: the compass becomes useless. A GPS device can show you where you are on the footprint of a multi-storey car park but not at which level.

A low-dimensional model is incapable of adequately representing, let alone successfully explicating (and that is what models are for, after all), the realities of a higher-dimensional phenomenon. Even though we are very familiar with two-dimensional representations of three-dimensional objects (e.g. physical maps, photographs, X-rays, TV screens, etc.), such projections are necessarily, in a strict sense, reductive: depth can only be rendered by use of illusion involving the manipulation of light, perspective or focus to simulate a realistic viewing experience. No amount of turning a photo around will disclose what is behind the object depicted on it. Humbling as it may sound, a translation theory which relies on prototypically two-dimensional concepts – such as, for example, area, field, zone, and even the celebrated turn – has merely matched the level of representational (un)sophistication typical of Edwin A. Abbott's (1884/1992) imaginary Flatland.

Following up on this realisation, we suggest that successful efforts of developing a properly complex theoretical model for translation must be committed to a higher dimensionality. There are already several approaches employing three-dimensional concepts. Kwame Anthony Appiah's idea of "thick translation" (1993), based on Clifford Geertz's "thick description" (1973: 3–30), literally adds depth to flat and therefore deceptive representations. The Actor-Network Theory (e.g. Latour 2005) invites us to imagine complex, entangled, multilateral and dynamic structures vitally depending on broadly understood translation. A related concept of a rhizome (Deleuze and Guattari 2004/1987) – a non-hierarchical, non-linear, organically flexible structure – has recently been deployed in support of "ubiquitous translation" (Blumczynski 2016; see also Arduini and Nergaard 2011). In a similar spirit, Douglas Robinson describes the dimensional expansion of his earlier, linear understanding of translation dynamics (the force coming from the author towards the translator is subsequently re-directed towards the reader) under the influence of Martha Cheung, "who understood that dialogue Daoistically [...] in terms of what we might want to call *pan*-attentiveness, since the forces of change are everywhere, and we interact with them continually, on many levels at once" (2016, 9).

Multidimensional thinking

Our proposed solution to the problem of lower-dimensional models has an ambition of avoiding the trap it has exposed. Rather than suggest a replacement for earlier approaches (that would be a very bivalent ambition, would it not?), we seek to extend them into a higher dimensionality. We do not want to abandon the existing set of concepts and invent new ones; our chief meta-theoretical tenet is that any useful concept is potentially multidimensional (that is, contrastable with numerous oppositions, rather than a single one, as is the case in polar thinking). This is consistent with findings of cognitive linguistics: polysemy, the fact that a

particular word may evoke different, loosely connected or virtually unconnected meanings, is a rule rather than an exception. Vocabulary of a natural language tends to be polysemous, and the various latent meanings only become salient when contrasted with a specific conceptual opposition; in short, "words are protean in nature" (Evans 2009, xi). We suggest that one productive approach to imagining, describing and thinking about this polysemy is to do so in dimensional terms. In order to illustrate this approach, we will return to some continuum-based ideas mentioned earlier and try to re-imagine them according to a fuzzy, multidimensional logic.

The concept of "the quality continuum" repeatedly invoked by Colina (2008) in her study on translation quality evaluation presents a good case of the streamlining effect we have been critiquing. The very need to operationalize such a rich category as translation quality into a range of specific descriptors (ranging from functional adequacy to terminological correctness) already signals the various interdependent dimensions into which it extends. This disaggregation of interrelated factors, typical of quantitative methodologies, may indeed provide "a way of assessing textual and communicative/pragmatic adequacy of translations, rather than being limited to grammatical and or stylistic errors at the sentence level, and changes in meaning" (2008, 107); but squeezing all these properties, and many others, back into a single "quality continuum" is a big methodological and logical leap. True, evaluating translations in various professional and pedagogical settings normally means placing them on a linear scale used for benchmarking or grading. But the fact that the same grade or numerical value is routinely assigned to translations which deserve it for different reasons renders "the quality continuum" useless in theoretical terms. Rather, it is by exploring these reasons, by probing into the various, often conflicting, dimensions of quality, that we can understand this complex notion better. Simply arranging translations from best to worst, and putting numerical values on them, may perhaps be a starting point but definitely not the end result of a meaningful study into translation quality. The assumption that translation quality can be productively – and not just pragmatically – conceptualized as a linear continuum is, in our view, highly debatable.

And what about the AUTHOR – MULTILINGUAL WRITER – SELF-TRANSLATOR – TRANSLATOR continuum? To be fair, the researchers who postulate it openly focus their gaze on agent roles and admit that the respective practices overlap (Meylaerts and Gonne 2014, 147). But it is still problematic to accept that, in this or any other aspect, a greater distance must separate an author from a self-translator than from a multilingual writer – a conclusion probably unintended by the researchers but forced by the continuum concept they invoke. This unidimensional logic conceals other possible configurations: for example, could authors and self-translators share something with each other, bypassing multilingual writers (who are posited as an intermediate link on the continuum)? When an author has limited command of the target language and works in tandem with another person, is not such assisted self-translator closer to the category of a (monolingual) author than a multilingual writer? Would not such a self-translator require translational assistance – for instance, when answering questions at press conferences, giving interviews, or negotiating with publishers in the target language – much like a monolingual author but unlike a multilingual writer? Could not some (monolingual) authors have less agency than some (self-)translators simply because of legal peculiarities? The case of Stanisław Lem's *Solaris* comes to mind: the publisher of the English translation (made indirectly from a French one), as the copyright holder, for several decades successfully blocked any initiatives by Lem's estate to commission a re-translation directly from

the original Polish (see Blumczyński 2010). All these are, of course, speculative questions which may or may not be worth exploring; the relevant point is that a low-dimensional approach renders them “illogical” and thus brushes them outside the scope of scholarly interest. In the multidimensional model we propose, these four roles could be lifted from a continuum which enforces a linear optics and instead be imagined as fuzzy nodes within a living rhizome, connected to other nodes *both* directly and via other nodes. Difficult as it is to represent this network of relationships using two- or even three-dimensional imaging, would it not do more justice to its complexity? Would it not encourage us to pursue certain directions of enquiry without a fear of contradiction, the big whip of Aristotelian logic?

In a similar vein, the popular LITERAL – FREE continuum, from the rich cluster of significations evoked by these two concepts, arguably isolates one dimension, roughly corresponding to the source – target orientation. But we can also think of other binaries involving each one of these concepts, for example LITERAL – LIBERAL; LITERAL – FIGURATIVE; LITERAL – POETIC; LITERAL – SPIRITUAL; even, somewhat paradoxically, given the shared etymology of these two, LITERAL – LITERARY; and so on. FREE comes with just as broad a range of dimensional extensions along the lines of FREE – CONSTRAINED; FREE – ATTACHED; FREE – ENSLAVED; FREE – OCCUPIED; FREE – SYSTEMATIC; FREE – PAID; and so on, including FREE – LITERAL. Some of these pairs involve a clear evaluative pattern, others less so and their axiology is therefore prone to a greater contextual variation (for example, to be described as liberal may be considered a complement or an insult, depending on one's political views). Many of these concepts jointly contrasting with LITERAL are related to one another but differ in their emphases, however subtly. Even close synonyms (e.g. FREEDOM and LIBERTY, as well as their adjectival forms) highlight various semantic nuances and carry different connotations. Moreover, in some contexts, certain pairs may not even be oppositions (e.g. in cabalistic traditions, LITERAL and SPIRITUAL are closely connected). The complexity of such a conceptual bundle is further illustrated by the fact that a negation can bring together all these divergent threads in a focal point: an approach described as NON-LITERAL may also be, without contradiction, LIBERAL, FIGURATIVE, POETIC, SPIRITUAL, LITERARY, and so on. Various negation patterns can break the unidimensionality of a conceptual opposition and expose its evaluative axes stretching in various directions (for example, consider the pairs FORMAL – FUNCTIONAL and FUNCTIONAL – DYSFUNCTIONAL which, when conflated, would render formal translations dysfunctional). A statement such as “X is a more literal translation than Y, which by comparison is freer though systematic and yet non-liberal” follows a convoluted conceptual trajectory which zig-zags across several dimensions, making it impossible to position these two hypothetical translations on the initial LITERAL – FREE continuum without a sense of logical discomfort.

That is because we intuit multiple dimensions here: the imagined movement from LITERAL to FREE and then to SYSTEMATIC (setting aside the bifurcation towards NON-LIBERAL), does not quite bring us back to where we started. Literal translations do not have to be systematic (or unsystematic), any more than free translations do not have to be liberal (or metaphysical, or unpaid, etc.). We do not have enough space here to explore in detail other multi-furcating trajectories – but probably do not need to in order to demonstrate how they explode the linear continuum from within. You may think of the following progression of conceptual oppositions: LITERAL – POETIC – PROSAIC – IMAGINATIVE – DULL – SHARP – SAFE – DANGEROUS and so on, potentially *ad infinitum*, and only partially tongue in cheek.

It is possible to imagine a translational process which is simultaneously moving away from both poles of the LITERAL – FREE continuum: for example, ACTIVIST may contrast with either one of them. In the field of Bible translation, versions such as *The Inclusive New Testament* (1994) insert (or restore, depending on your perspective) gender-neutral references in traditionally gendered passages (e.g. Ephesians 5:22 is rendered “Those of you who are in committed relationships should yield to each other” rather than “Wives, submit yourselves to your own husbands” [New International Version]), arguing that the spiritual message of the source text is obscured by a masculinist bias, so removing it will bring us closer to the original inclusive sense. Does this approach lead us towards a more literal or a freer translation? “Yes”, we are tempted to answer in the spirit of fuzzy logic. We would argue that these two dimensions (LITERAL – FREE; ACTIVIST – UNINVOLVED) are, in logical terms, mutually problematizing. They signal that moving away from one orientation does not necessarily bring you closer to its “logical” opposition; the zero-sum rule does not apply here.

As three-dimensional beings, we may find it difficult to envision a greater number of dimensions, and indeed attempts at “envisioning” will probably hold us back from embracing a higher multidimensionality. In this article, we have deliberately refrained from providing any visual representation of our proposed logical model because that would be self-defeating: doing so would immediately subject it to the limitations we have been describing. Let our scholarly imagination be fuelled by the realization that some branches of theoretical physics, such as string theories, count dimensions in double digits. We may not always be able to chart these dimensions using a set of coordinates but should not discard our intuitions when they tell us that a certain phenomenon belongs in a different dimension than others. It is these intuitions, rather than linear logic, that may deserve to be trusted.

Towards a practice of theorizing

Research articles with a strong theoretical focus run the risk of being too abstract in their implications and too vague in their applications. Therefore, in this final section, we would like to suggest translating our proposed approach into the practice of theorizing and at the same time bring together the main threads of the argument we have been spinning.

Let us state it loud and clear: we are not arguing that binary oppositions and linear continua be banished from any discussions of translational phenomena. We recognize that they may have valid cognitive, heuristic and didactic applications. It may be useful to isolate a particular dimension for a closer examination whilst (temporarily) excluding others from consideration. The ability to make distinctions which are often bivalent is an indispensable cognitive skill: “Without the cognitive tools of differentiation life would be characterized by entropy. In order to define their place in the world individuals are in continuous search for identity and difference” (Ibsch 2010, 464). For pragmatic reasons, humans need to be able to quickly categorize others as friends or foes and view alternative courses of action as good or bad. Such binary categorizations may lack finesse but they are sometimes necessary; there are situations in which any decision is better than none. Even as we challenge the explanatory power of binaries and, by extension, continua, we employ in our own argument a number of bivalent distinctions, even as fuzzy and subjective as helpful/unhelpful, simplified/complex, suspect/reliable, and so on, drawing on their intuitive axiological charge and rhetorical power.

They serve as mental shortcuts in heuristic and pedagogical endeavours and help gain a quicker understanding of complex problems.

However, we should not forget that these heuristic and pragmatic applications are just that: they speed up our problem-solving and decision-making processes but are counterproductive to theorizing that seeks to account for complexity. When multidimensional translational concepts (such as quality, agency, representation, etc.) are squeezed into a unidimensional scale, they risk not just being caricaturized but deformed beyond recognition. As Ellis points out, a formulation of facts may embody “far reaching decisions about how to conceive those facts” and determine “what kinds of things facts are to be”, thus committing us conceptually and theoretically “in ways we might not have wished to be committed had we thought it through before the decision was made” (1993, 15). We would therefore postulate that before deploying, however casually, any continuum-based theoretical account, consideration be given to the following questions: (1) is the proposed approach comfortable with a zero-sum logic and its ramifications?; and (2) can simultaneous membership in both categories posed as polar opposites be ruled out? If the answer to both these questions is negative – which we hope should be the case in a significant number of situations – that should lead to re-assessing that particular instance of continuum-based theorization. Coming back to the choice postulated by Schleiermacher: leaving the writer in peace and setting the reader in motion (or vice versa) is no guarantee that the two will be brought closer together; in fact, they may well be pushed further apart.

This brings us to the final point. We have sought to demonstrate the benefits of multidimensional conceptualization of categories, complemented by insights from fuzzy logic, in theoretical accounts of translational phenomena. But these benefits have a much wider reach. Our proposed model invites a certain epistemological attitude and ethical stance. To say “I am not sure”, “It depends”, or “This issue really belongs in another dimension” is not a sign of poor scholarship, imprecise measurement, academic permissiveness or simply dodging the question. Rather, it reflects a commitment to resist the pressure – built into some of the earlier scholarly traditions – to seek clarity and certainty in the face of complex, confusing and ambiguous experience. The fuzzy logician Bart Kosko notes aphoristically: “Precision up, information up. Information up, fuzz up” (1993, 37). Pursuing precision means being ready for more, not less, fuzziness. This includes the willingness to re-examine not just the boundaries of our categories, be they sharp or fuzzy, but the categories themselves. A multidimensional approach sensitises us to a key methodological question: “where the categories we work with come from, and how rigid we perceive them to be”, as Mona Baker (2009, 224) puts it. One reaction in face of this question, she suggests, is “to refrain from using categories which pre-exist the research and analysis and instead allow such (temporary) categories to emerge from the analysis itself” (2009, 224). We believe that a meta-theoretical commitment to multidimensionality is conducive to this practice by questioning the logic of certain conceptual oppositions, and thus problematizing the concepts themselves.

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